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NPS Foundation Continues Legacy of Institutional Support

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Article By: Kenneth A. Stewart

If you have received a student award or participated in the America's Heroes Charity Golf Tournament, chances are you have rubbed elbows with one of the Naval Postgraduate School's (NPS) long-time supporters, the NPS Foundation.

As a private entity, the foundation is able to gather and solicit funds that directly support, among other things, its goal of promoting the development of military leaders at NPS.

Executive Director retired Navy Capt. David Silkey leads the foundation. He came to NPS last year after retiring from the Navy where he last served as an air wing commander.

"Our vision is to work with NPS and support its strategic initiatives. We want to make a difference," said Silkey. "Our center of gravity is NPS' students, what they have accomplished in their careers past, and what they will accomplish in their careers future."

NPS Provost Dr. Douglas Hensler is the university's designated liaison with the foundation.

"The foundation exists to support NPS. They support us by matching our priorities with its donor base, but we do not and should not solicit funds," said Hensler. "We merely communicate our priorities to the public and the foundation marries them to our many supporters who want to contribute to the institution."

Donations to the NPS Foundation support the institution by, amongst other things, purchasing computers and software, funding guest lectures and providing research support. Around campus, the foundation also supports many things that those unfamiliar with its work may take for granted.

The NPS Foundation supported the restoration of the Roman Plunge pool, decorates the Quarterdeck during the holidays, and organizes events like the American Heroes Charity Golf Tournament and the Grand Winter Ball. Silkey notes the charity golf tournament, in its 9th iteration, has raised in excess of \$4.2 million dollars for notable charities. It has also brought major thinkers and policy makers, like former Vice President Dan Quayle and renowned economist Thomas Friedman, to the Monterey Peninsula.

Foundation donations also directly support student life and scholarly activities, such as student athletic and activity clubs, and the presentation of student awards for academic and thesis excellence.

But according to Silkey, the foundation's primary purpose is to provide a margin of excellence in academic research where appropriated funds fall short.

"If we look at the foundations that support school's like Stanford or Berkeley, they provide a margin of excellence that's critically important to their institutions," said Silkey.

He adds that some 90 percent of the money raised by the University of California, Berkeley comes from its foundation, and while there are many differences between a state school like Berkeley and a Navy graduate school like NPS, Silkey insists the NPS Foundation has the potential to make a contribution to the university's legacy.

"Consider what NPS has been able to accomplish within its current budgetary constraints ... leading operations research, systems engineering, defense analysis and CHDS [Center for Homeland Defense and Security] programs. Then, take a moment to consider what NPS could accomplish with the kind of private sector funding that institutions like Berkeley enjoy," said Silkey.

Currently, the NPS Foundation is reaching out to analogous foundations like those that support the Naval Academy and the Naval War College to leverage lessons-learned and to ensure both transparent and clear operational guidelines.

In the meantime, Silkey says the NPS Foundation will continue to serve university's students, faculty and staff by bringing people together and telling the NPS story to both supporters and the general public.

"We bridge the gap between students from different countries, services, communities, schools, curriculums and beyond.

"We encourage students to think beyond the limits of their own personal 'tribe.' Whether it be a military occupational specialty or the bridging of computer science students with defense analysis students, the synergy and habitual relationships for future collaboration between services and partner nations are boundless," said Silkey.

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NPS Foundation Executive Director retired Navy Capt. David Silkey, top center, and the Foundation staff are pictured outside the organization's office. The Foundation assists NPS by matching the institution's short- and long-term strategic priorities to its base of interested donors and supporters.